

## WHAT RESULT DO WE WANT?

All people in North Carolina have equitable and adaptive/adaptable access to physical activity opportunities across the lifespan.

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Exercise is essential for physical, social, and mental well-being. All North Carolina residents need equitable access to safe areas where they can be physically active. Equitable community environments support physical activity behaviors and provide safe exercise opportunities for the entire community. These spaces should be crime-free and accessible by public transit. They should also include safe and well-lit sidewalks, walking trails, greenways, and bike lanes.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

### HNC 2030 HEADLINE INDICATOR:

Percent of people with access to exercise opportunities

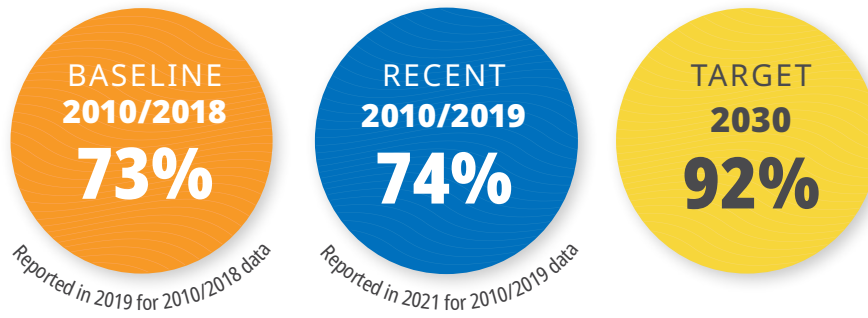
Access to safe exercise space has been highly correlated to a community's increased level of physical activity.<sup>4</sup> Among adolescents, access has been shown to increase time spent in vigorous physical activity, and to lower obesity rates.<sup>5</sup>

Regular physical activity decreases risk for premature morbidity and mortality. Regular exercise habits have been linked to improved brain health and balance in elderly populations. It can lower risk for obesity, depression, anxiety, and dementia. Conversely, lack of physical activity can lead to serious chronic diseases, including cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. To reduce risk of chronic disease, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that adults engage in 150 minutes of physical exercise/physical activity per week, and children engage in a minimum of 60 minutes of physical exercise per day.<sup>6,7</sup>

## WHAT DOES THIS INDICATOR MEASURE?

Access to exercise opportunities measures the percentage of individuals in a county who live reasonably close to a location for physical activity. Locations for physical activity are defined as parks or recreational facilities. Individuals are considered to have access to exercise opportunities if they:

- reside in a census block that is within a half mile of a park, or
- reside in an urban census block that is within one mile of a recreational facility, or
- reside in a rural census block that is within three miles of a recreational facility.

BASELINE DATA FROM *HNC 2030*

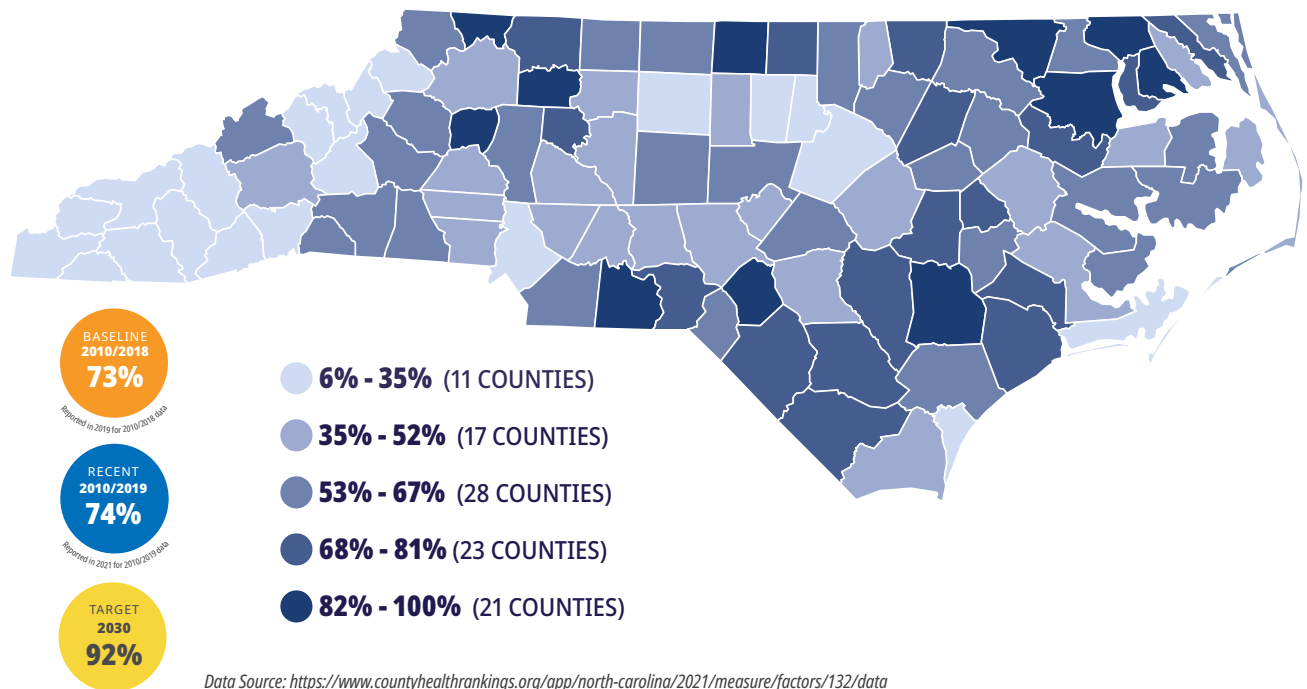
## HOW ARE WE DOING?

- The *HNC 2030* target seeks to increase access to exercise opportunities from 73% to 92% by 2030.
- This measure is not appropriate for measuring progress because the data sources and definitions have changed

over time, making them incomparable. For more information see <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/north-carolina/2022/measure/factors/132/description>.

## CURRENT DATA TRENDED OVER TIME

Figure 34. Percent of people with access to exercise opportunities in North Carolina counties (2021)



## THE STORY BEHIND THE CURVE

Multiple factors can impact individual access to exercise opportunities. These factors include income, race/ethnicity, geography, and disabilities. Low-income communities may have fewer parks recreational facilities, in contrast to more affluent communities.<sup>8</sup> People of color are less likely to live near parks.<sup>9</sup> Compared to metropolitan populations, residents of rural areas face additional barriers to activity opportunities.<sup>10</sup> Finally, parks and recreational facilities may lack appropriate accommodations for individuals with physical disabilities, rendering these areas inaccessible to this population.<sup>11</sup>

### *Dialogue from the 2022 NC State Health Improvement Plan Community Council Meeting and Symposia*

- How is equity defined and how do you measure it?
- How is accessibility defined and how do you measure it? equity and access to be able to measure it?
- How is the impact of infrastructure, like walking trails, measured?
- There is grading system for community parks that has a check list and looks at who has access, is equipment ADA, are wheelchair swings available, safety and disrepair of the equipment, and timing of those that are using the park.

Policies and investment are needed to support development and expansion of community parks, transit options, sidewalk improvements, and to increase the number of greenways, walking trails and bike path.

Community partners such as childcare facilities, schools, churches, and workplaces provide essential services and infrastructure, in promoting access to physical activities. Supporting the efforts of these entities can improve access for all citizens. The COVID-19 pandemic affected physical access to facilities and interrupted the efforts of some community partnerships. Improved capabilities for partnering and providing for safe distancing will help to promote the reemergence and increased potential for robust equitable access to exercise opportunities for all.

## WHAT OTHER DATA DO WE NEED?

Work with the city and/or county planning departments to identify locations in the community that are used for physical activity and select or create your own measure(s).

- Walk-ability/Bike-ability of any location - <https://www.walkscore.com/>
- How to assess your community's environment, physical activity - <https://activelivingresearch.org/toolsandresources/toolsandmeasures>

## WHAT COULD WORK TO TURN THE CURVE?

- Adopt "Complete Streets" policies based on NC Department of Transportation guidelines
- Design "First and Last Mile Connections" and ADA-complaint shelters to support safe access to public transportation
- Expand transit services to increase access to places for physical activity
- Increase number of accessible community parks, particularly in rural areas
- Increase number of biking trails and lanes, walking trails, and greenways
- Increase the number of joint use/open use policy agreements for school playground facilities
- Increase opportunity for exercise for school children including active recess, physically active classrooms, school-based physical education enhancements, Walking School Buses, Safe Routes to School
- Maintain safe and well-lit sidewalks
- Promote mixed use development
- Provide public access to municipal recreation facilities
- Rethink prioritization measures for improvements, such as crash data, identification of marginalized populations, and infrastructure needs for vulnerable communities

## RECOMMENDED READING/LISTENING

Williams, J. (2022). Where we work, play, and live: Health equity and the physical environment. *North Carolina Medical Journal*, 83(2), 86-89. <https://doi.org/10.18043/ncm.83.2.86>



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## NC PARTNERS WHO CAN HELP US

PARTNER/POTENTIAL PARTNER	WEBSITE LINK
American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Livable Communities	<a href="https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/">https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/</a>
Boys & Girls Clubs of North Carolina	<a href="https://www.ncclubs.org/">https://www.ncclubs.org/</a>
Boy Scouts of America-East Carolina Council	<a href="https://www.eccbsa.org/">https://www.eccbsa.org/</a> *several councils across the state
Brenner FIT®- WakeHealth	<a href="https://www.wakehealth.edu/Specialty/b/Brenner-FIT">https://www.wakehealth.edu/Specialty/b/Brenner-FIT</a>
Bull City Fit	<a href="https://www.bullcityfit.org/">https://www.bullcityfit.org/</a>
Children's Healthy Weight Research (CHWR)- UNC Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention	<a href="https://chwr.web.unc.edu/">https://chwr.web.unc.edu/</a>
Children Wellness Initiative Network (WIN) - Walk Cabarrus	<a href="https://walkcabarrus.com/our-mission/">https://walkcabarrus.com/our-mission/</a>
Durham Parks & Recreation (DPR)	<a href="https://www.dprplaymore.org/">https://www.dprplaymore.org/</a>
Eat Smart Move More North Carolina	<a href="https://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/">https://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/</a>
Girl Scouts- North Carolina Coastal Pines	<a href="https://www.nccoastalpines.org/">https://www.nccoastalpines.org/</a>
Go NAPSACC (Nutrition and Physical Activity Self - Assessment for Child Care)	<a href="https://gonapsacc.org/">https://gonapsacc.org/</a>
Kids in Parks - TRACK Trails	<a href="https://www.kidsinparks.com/blog-topics/track-trails">https://www.kidsinparks.com/blog-topics/track-trails</a>
Lumber River Council of Governments	<a href="https://www.lumberrivercog.org/">https://www.lumberrivercog.org/</a>
National Recreation and Park Association	<a href="https://www.nrpa.org/">https://www.nrpa.org/</a>
NC Council of Churches	<a href="https://www.ncchurches.org/">https://www.ncchurches.org/</a>
NC State Design National Learning Initiative	<a href="https://naturalearning.org/">https://naturalearning.org/</a>
NC State Extension- Faithful Families	<a href="https://ncstepstohealth.ces.ncsu.edu/faithful-families/">https://ncstepstohealth.ces.ncsu.edu/faithful-families/</a> **FF is one program
North Carolina Department of Transportation - Great Trails State Plan, Safe Routes to School Program, Let's Go NC!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="https://www.ncdot.gov/Pages/default.aspx">https://www.ncdot.gov/Pages/default.aspx</a></li> <li><a href="https://www.ncdot.gov/divisions/bike-ped/great-trails-state/Pages/default.aspx">https://www.ncdot.gov/divisions/bike-ped/great-trails-state/Pages/default.aspx</a></li> <li><a href="https://www.ncdot.gov/initiatives-policies/safety/safe-routes-school/Pages/default.aspx">https://www.ncdot.gov/initiatives-policies/safety/safe-routes-school/Pages/default.aspx</a></li> </ul>
North Carolina Recreation and Park Association (NCRPA)	<a href="https://www.ncrpa.net/">https://www.ncrpa.net/</a>
The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. - Smart Start	<a href="https://www.smartstart.org/">https://www.smartstart.org/</a>
The Trust For Public Land	<a href="https://www.tpl.org/">https://www.tpl.org/</a>
The Walking Classroom	<a href="https://www.thewalkingclassroom.org/">https://www.thewalkingclassroom.org/</a>
Vision Zero Network	<a href="https://visionzeronetnetwork.org/">https://visionzeronetnetwork.org/</a>